

200.09 My Beef With Chomsky

[This was published in the Fall-Winter 2000/2001 issue (#36) of John Kelin's Fair Play online magazine (<http://home.rmi.net/~jkelin/fp.html>; now defunct) and is also archived here: <http://educate-yourself.org/cn/morrisseybeefwithchomsky2000.shtml>. It is also in *Looking for the Enemy, Addendum 5*.]

Chomsky and AIDS

In my first letter to Chomsky, in April 1989, I included my review of the Turner film, *The Men Who Killed Kennedy* [see Addendum 7], which I had seen a few months earlier and had so turned my head around. He replied (5/15/89) that the review was "interesting" and that he "didn't know about the events" I described.

In retrospect, this is a puzzling remark. Three years later (3/3/92) he told me he had "read a good bit of the critical literature" (meaning critical of the Warren Report), so I suppose he did this reading in the meantime, the Gulf War notwithstanding.

I learned in 1995, however, after reading Ray Marcus's *Appendix B* (1995, self-published), that Chomsky had been well informed about the evidence of high-level conspiracy in the assassination twenty years before I wrote to him. Marcus tells the story of trying to enlist the support of a number of progressive intellectuals in reopening the JFK case in 1969:

I first met with Noam Chomsky. Soon after our discussions began, he asked his secretary to cancel his remaining appointments for the day. The scheduled one-hour meeting stretched to 3-4 hours. Chomsky showed great interest in the material. We mutually agreed to a follow-up session later in the week. Then I met with Gar Alperovitz [a professor at Harvard]. At the end of our one-hour meeting, he said he would take an active part in the effort if Chomsky would lead it...

[The second meeting] again lasted much of an afternoon. The discussion ranged beyond evidentiary items to other aspects of the case. I told Chomsky of Alperovitz' offer to assist him if he decided to lead an effort to reopen. After the meeting, as they drove me back to my apartment, Bromberger [another MIT professor who had attended the meeting] expressed the view that, "If they are strong enough to kill the president, and strong enough to cover it up, then they are too strong to confront directly...if they feel sufficiently threatened., they may move to open totalitarian" ("they" was not further defined).

As we have seen from previous reactions by I.F. Stone, A.L. Wirin, and Carey McWilliams, this was similar to the fears expressed or implied by many leftist intellectuals among those who nevertheless professed faith in the Warren Report. From Bromberger, I was hearing it for the first time from someone who believed the report to be false.

I phoned Vince Salandria, of whom I had spoken to Chomsky, and asked him to send

Chomsky his research and thinking. Salandria told me he was skeptical that Chomsky would actually get involved, based on his previous experiences with such left-oriented people. He reasoned that had they entertained any such intentions, they would have acted on them long before this. Nevertheless, he agreed to send the material.

Upon returning to Los Angeles, I wrote a lengthy letter to Chomsky summing up my overview of the case to that time, and stating as cogently as I could the arguments for his active involvement. He responded on April 18, 1969:

Just a quick note. I got your long letter, and some material from Salandria. I'll read both carefully. But I won't be able to decide anything until I return from England, in mid-June. Right now things are simply too rushed, and I'm too harassed to give serious thought to anything. I'll be in touch with you then. I don't know what the odds are. I'm still open-minded (and I hope will remain so).

From the context of our previous meetings it was clear that what Chomsky "...won't be able to decide" until he returned from England was not the question of whether or not there was a conspiracy – that he had given every indication of having already decided in the affirmative – but whether or not he wished to participate actively, even to assume a leading role, in the movement to reopen the case.

I never heard from him again, and Chomsky did not join such a movement. On the contrary, in recent years he has on a number of occasions gone on record attacking the critics' position and supporting the Warren Report (pp. 67-68).

What "events" had I described in my little review that Chomsky "didn't know about," after being informed by Marcus and Salandria twenty years earlier?

There is a telling parallel to this behavior in Chomsky's reaction to the AIDS origin issue.

In late summer 1989, I sent Chomsky an early (1986) paper by Segal in English and a copy of his first book, *Aids: Erreger aus dem Genlabor* ("AIDS: Virus from the Pentagon," Berlin: Simon und Leutner, 1987), which, though in German, I thought he would be able to read. (After all, I had to pass a German reading exam to qualify for my Ph.D. in linguistics, and he is the most famous linguist in the world!) He thanked me (8/26/89) for "the surprising and very interesting material," without further comment.

I had "surprised" him with the "very interesting" argument that the Pentagon had created AIDS, and this was all he had to say? It was my turn to be surprised. On Sept. 14, 1989 I sent him a copy of an article I had written summarizing Segal's theory ("Is AIDS Man-Made?"). He thanked me (9/22/89) for the "information," which he said was "most intriguing," but again had no further comment.

On Nov. 29, 1989, I sent Chomsky a photocopy of the MacArthur testimony from the Congressional Record (see "Informing the Press" in Chapter 4). He replied (12/28/89):

Thanks also for the material from the Hearings. Sends a chill up the spine. This is very far from my field, and I have no scientific judgment. But it is hard for me to believe that one can't obtain a scientific judgment from some knowledgeable and unprejudiced source. I don't know people directly involved in AIDS research, but

there are plenty of them around.

A year later, on Nov. 30, 1990, I sent him another article about Segal, focussing on the MacArthur testimony (see Ch. 4.1). Chomsky's reply (12/17/90) was: "Quite a story." These were his last words on the subject to me. A "chill up the spine," but the man who calls Washington the "terrorist capital of the world" has no more to say on the subject.

The parallel is clear. In 1969, he learns from Marcus and Salandria about the evidence for conspiracy in the assassination, but has not a word more to say about the subject until twenty years later, when I write to him, at which time he professes "surprise" to hear about it. In 1989, he also expresses surprise and horror at the idea that the "terrorist" US government may have created AIDS, but has nothing further to say on this subject either. This behavior strikes me as very much out of character – at least out of the character that I thought, from reading his books, that Chomsky possessed.

There is another significant parallel. Chomsky's trust in the integrity and objectivity of the "scientific community" (in quotes because I think it is more like the Mafia than a community) is astonishing, and again totally out of character for a man who is considered by many to be the "leading intellectual dissident" in the country. In 1989 he assures me that "knowledgeable and unprejudiced" sources can answer the question of the origin of AIDS (although he obviously does not wish to pursue the question, despite a "chill up the spine"). A couple of years later, Chomsky reveals his absolute faith in the National Academy of Sciences. In dismissing the notion of conspiracy in the JFK assassination, he gives this example of conspiracy logic (July 1, 1992):

Thus when the National Academy of Sciences refutes by careful experiment the one reason offered by the House Committee to question the Warren Report, we can simply conclude that the scientists are in on the conspiracy. Anyone who knows them personally knows that this is laughable...

It is hard to remember, reading this, that the author is Noam Chomsky, author of many books and articles excoriating other academics and journalists, not to mention politicians and government officials, for their conformist, propagandized mentality (e.g., *Manufacturing Consent*). But in these lines we learn not only that it is "laughable" to doubt the judgment of a member of the National Academy of Scientists, but also, implicitly, that the House Select Committee on Assassinations 1979 report is trustworthy.

No one who has read "a good bit of the literature" could maintain such faith in either of these institutions – even before Gaeton Fonzi's definitive exposé of the HSCA's thoroughly compromised "investigation" (*The Last Investigation*, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1993). No one, at least, who is not either incredibly naive, or the worst example of the kind of propagandized intellectual that Chomsky has so often (and effectively and correctly) warned us about.

Chomsky and CAIB/CAQ

Chomsky suggested that I send my review of the Turner film (*The Men Who Killed Kennedy*) to *CovertAction Information Bulletin* (now *Quarterly*). This was the first I had heard of it. One of CAIB's editors, Bill Vornberger, answered on 10/25/89 that they could not print my review

because they were planning to run a review of Jim Garrison's *On the Trail of the Assassins*, which had just come out, in their next issue. This review never appeared, and as far as I know CAIB/CAB has never published anything about the Kennedy assassination.

Thus the first obvious question: Why has a journal devoted to exposing the misdeeds of the CIA so conspicuously avoided the subject of the JFK assassination, when a large portion of the general public believes the CIA was involved, and especially since the journal's longtime editors, Bill Schaap and Ellen Ray, were also the editors at Sheridan Square Press, which published Garrison's book, and the editors of *Lies Of Our Times*, a political monthly (now defunct) that published favorable (and reasonable) reviews of the Stone film?

Chomsky has always been a supporter of CAIB/CAQ; his photo adorns the magazine's subscription inserts. "Quite a good rag," he told me (May 15, 1989). "I write for it a lot." Here again is a statement which in retrospect I find very puzzling. If I had bothered to check, I would have found that Chomsky had published only two articles in CAIB – actually only one, since the second one (No. 32, summer 1989) was simply a shortened version of the first (No. 26, summer 1986), and they were identically titled ("Libya in US Demonology").

Why did Schaap and Ray publish virtually the same article twice within three years? They had never done such a thing before, and they haven't since. Why would Chomsky refer to this one article, published twice, as "a lot"? How could he write for it "a lot," if it was only one article?

On May 21, 1992, referring to Alexander Cockburn's review of the Stone film in *The Nation*, Chomsky wrote to me:

But so far, his account is the only one in print that does justice to the factual record. Perhaps I should abstain from comment on this, since I did a lot of the background research for it (though what he wrote is his way of using it).

I would like to know how many professors, especially famous professors, do "background research" for journalists. Chomsky is the only one I have ever heard of. Maybe this is the way to understand his remark about having written "a lot" for CAIB, although only one article had appeared under his name. If he does "background research" for Alexander Cockburn, why shouldn't he do it for others?

Although CAIB/CAQ has strictly avoided the assassination in print, Vornberger told me in the same letter that "we are very much aware of the fact that Kennedy was killed by members of a conspiracy." "In fact," Vornberger continued, "it is our opinion that these men were current or former employees of the CIA." Vornberger also said "we highly recommend" Jim Garrison's *On the Trail of the Assassins*. The question screaming at us here is: If that's what they think, why haven't they written about it?

CAIB/CAQ and AIDS

I also sent the AIDS material, which Chomsky found to be "quite a story," to *Lies Of Our Times*. Bill Schaap replied (12/27/90) that they had "real problems" with it (see Ch. 4.1). CAQ did not come out with an AIDS article until six years later, in their Fall 1996 (No. 58) issue. This article, "Tracking the Real Genocide," by David Gilbert, a prison inmate, hardly fulfilled Schaap's call for fair coverage of "alternative theories." Gilbert offers a two-sentence

summary of Segal's theory, failing to mention that Segal claims the virus escaped by accident, thus making it appear that Segal blamed the Pentagon for spreading it on purpose, which he did not. This gross misrepresentation of Segal is especially surprising considering what Schaap had written to me six years earlier (12/27/90). But in 1996 Schaap allows Gilbert to get away with this blatant misrepresentation.

What "problems," one must ask, did the CAIB editors have with the Segal material? Why did they have no problems with the Gilbert article, which they must have known was a travesty? Gilbert not only misrepresents Segal but fails completely to mention other dissident AIDS researchers, notably Robert Strecker and Alan Cantwell. He dismisses the science of the matter by asking his microbiologist friend Janet Stavnezer, who assured him that "the Segals' splice theory is scientifically impossible."

In the issue of CAQ following the Gilbert article (No. 59, Winter 1996), Nathaniel Lehrman writes in a letter to the editor that his 1987 article "Is AIDS Non-Infectious" (CAIB No. 28) "examined and demolished the Segal hypothesis of a synthetically created AIDS virus." This is truly astonishing. It will be clear to anyone who reads the earlier article that exactly the opposite is true. In that article, Lehrman suggests that HIV, although it is only "closely associated " with AIDS [following Duesberg], might be "a laboratory-created, minimally infective agent intended to be blamed for the chemical poisoning it actually accompanies."

Far from "demolishing" Segal, Lehrman affirms and goes considerably *beyond* it, suggesting that AIDS was not only man-made, but created *as a weapon*:

The information described here, and the history of CBW research, suggest that AIDS may indeed be another example of a deliberately created disease (p. 62).

How is one to understand such self-contradictions? Schaap tells me in 1990 that his magazine wants to give decent coverage to "alternative" theories like Segal's, and six years later he publishes an article that does just the opposite. Gilbert gives us "official AIDS doctrine," as Lehrman puts it, grossly misrepresenting Segal, and Lehrman responds with an even grosser misrepresentation of what he himself had written in the same magazine nine years earlier!

One thing is clear: the message, flawed as it is, from CAIB/CAQ is that theories of the artificial origin of AIDS are not to be taken seriously.

Chomsky and Vietnam

Chomsky's argument is that

1. Vietnam policy did not change after the assassination (until 1968, of course)
2. Only tactics changed, quite coincidentally, at the same time as the assassination, in response to the changed military situation.
3. The change in tactics was first made by JFK, not LBJ.

The first argument is justified by Chomsky's definition of the word *policy* to mean "withdrawal if and only if victory is assured." This is his interpretation, from which he refuses to budge an

inch, of one sentence in the McNamara-Taylor recommendations approved by NSAM 263:

This action [troop withdrawals] should be explained in low key as an initial step in a long-term program to replace U.S. personnel with trained Vietnamese without impairment of the war effort.

Chomsky insists that the last six words constitute an "explicit condition" of victory before any withdrawal would take place, and that this was the policy of both JFK and LBJ.

This is pure linguistics. Now, Chomsky is the greatest linguist in the world, but look at the linguistic facts he ignores in his interpretation:

First, the sentence can easily be understood to mean "This is the way we should explain it, but not necessarily the whole truth." Obviously, McNamara and Taylor (and JFK) would not have wanted it to look like they were simply abandoning the South Vietnamese.

More importantly, the phrase "without impairment of the war effort" is *not* an explicit condition, even if the most famous linguist in the world says it is. Consider:

My plan is to wash the windows without hurting the plants.

Does this mean (Chomsky's interpretation):

My plan is to wash the windows if and only if I can do so without hurting the plants.

Or does it mean, as I am quite certain it does,

My plan is to wash the windows and not hurt the plants (and I think I can do so).

This is what the sentence means, and it is what McNamara and Taylor meant:

The plan – at least the way we should explain the plan – is to withdraw and do so without impairment of the war effort (which as we have said should be taken over completely by the Vietnamese by the end of 1965).

But Chomsky wants us to understand it as:

The plan is to withdraw if and only if victory is assured.

Who is right? You be the judge.

The second argument is meant to back up the first. If the policy never changed, it does not matter when the tactics changed, whether under JFK or LBJ, but we would still be left with the troublesome coincidence that the change in tactics (in fact a reversal, from withdrawal to escalation, from not fighting the war to fighting the war) took place immediately after the assassination.

But lo and behold, on Jan. 31, 1991, right out of the blue, apparently, a draft of NSAM 273 appears from the black box that houses "national security" secrets, with no explanation as to why it was being released 13 years after the final document was released (NSAM 273 was declassified in 1978), or who or what was causing it to be released (an interesting question in itself, as is the question of its authenticity).

This is all Chomsky needs for his third argument: If anyone should insist that even a reversal of tactics, if not of policy, so close on the heels of the murder of the head of state in charge of both the policy and the tactics, could be suspicious, thanks to the Bundy draft we now know that the person behind the change in tactics was not Johnson, but Kennedy.

Why? Because Bundy wrote the draft on Nov. 21, one day before the assassination! Therefore, Chomsky concludes, JFK would have signed it (although he never saw it or discussed it with Bundy or anyone else). Therefore, Chomsky further concludes, the people who say NSAM 273 shows a change in policy (Peter Dale Scott, John Newman, Arthur Schlesinger) are right, but wrong about who was responsible for it.

Chomsky's third argument actually contradicts the first. It's like saying, "I don't care what flavor it is, but make sure it's vanilla." If "tactical" changes don't matter, they don't matter. If they don't matter, there is no reason to make the further point – dubious in itself – that JFK made the change. By adding this third argument, Chomsky allows for the possibility that the "tactical" change was indeed significant, which destroys the premise expressed in the first argument.

What does all this mean? What is the message we are hearing from Chomsky and CAIB/CAQ? It is clear:

No AIDS conspiracy

No assassination conspiracy

No connection between Vietnam and the assassination

Surely it cannot escape our attention that this is precisely the same message we have been hearing from the government, from the mainstream press, and the so-called "scientific community." Nor should it escape our attention, as I think even this brief summary shows, that the argumentation presented to support these conclusions is patently false in each case.

Of course it is not necessarily wrong to agree with the government. But when "radical dissidents" agree so completely with the government, on such important questions, and the reasoning employed is so clearly wrong, the warning bells should sound.

Ding dong.